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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA/FO, SA/A, EB/BTA FOR MBGOODMAN
TREASURY FOR PARAMESWARAN
NSC FOR AHARRIMAN, KAMEND
COMMERCE FOR AADLER
USTR FOR GHICKS

SENSITIVE

E.O.12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#)

SUBJECT: AFGHAN WTO ACCESSION: MODEST PROGRESS

REF: 05 Kabul 3697

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) The GOA is making modest progress on WTO accession and plans to reach out to the Afghan private sector to promote WTO membership. The Afghan Commerce Ministry, which has the lead on WTO accession, is building in-house trade capacity to support its accession efforts. The Embassy will seek to provide assistance for additional capacity building efforts. End Summary.

PROGRESS ON THE WTO FOREIGN TRADE REGIME MEMORANDUM

2. (SBU) Econoffs met with Sultana Parvanta, an Afghan-American who is working as a senior advisor to Commerce Minister Arsala, to discuss the latest developments in the GOA's WTO accession efforts. Parvanta has the lead on WTO accession at the Commerce Ministry and heads up an inter-ministerial task force on accession. She informed Econoffs that she has completed three chapters of the Foreign Trade Regime Memorandum (FTRM), which has yet to be vetted with the task force. (Note: The FTRM describes the status of a country's commercial and economic laws and must be submitted to the WTO before formal trade regime negotiations can begin. In early December 2005, Ambassador Assad Omer, the GOA's Permanent Representative in Geneva, said a draft of the FTRM would be completed by March, 2006. At that time, no part of the FTRM had been written.)

CAPACITY-BUILDING GATHERS MOMENTUM

3. (SBU) Parvanta does not have a trade policy background, has virtually no support staff and is working mightily to compensate for these deficiencies. She attended a three week WTO trade policy training course in Geneva in September, 2005 (expenses paid by UNCTAD) and is now conducting capacity-building seminars for Ministry staff to develop in-house know-how to support the accession effort. In addition, she has been assisted by three junior consultants, two from Bearing Point and one from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). One of the Bearing Point representatives, Khalid Yousefsai, is an Afghan who recently began attending the WTO's three month long trade policy course designed to help WTO accession candidates and will be hired as a permanent Ministry employee upon his return. Parvanta has also begun working with three Ministry employees whom she discovered have had varying levels of trade policy training and they are now assisting her on accession issues.

4. (SBU) UNCTAD, which has been designated by the Commerce Ministry as the lead coordinator on accession issues, has promised to provide Parvanta with a translator. This is crucial because all accession-related documents must be translated into both English and Dari. (Note: The inter-ministerial task force, which includes representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Justice, Finance, Agriculture, Mines and Industry, Economy, the Central Bank (DAB) and other line ministries, has few members who are fluent in English.) USAID will also provide three new consultants for trade policy, law and regulation and human resources.

OUTREACH TO PRIVATE SECTOR ON WTO ACCESSION

15. (SBU) Parvanta plans to reach out to the Afghan private sector after completing in-house capacity-building at the Ministry. The purpose of the outreach is to explain the benefits of WTO membership and the accession process in order to build private sector support for WTO accession. Parvanta intends to begin a series of public discussions with the Afghan business community starting in April. She has requested USG assistance with this effort. Parvanta also promised to provide copies of commercial legislation, both drafts and enacted laws, for USTR to review for WTO compliance.

COMMENT

16. (SBU) In a short time Parvanta has made commendable progress in steering the GOA further down the long road of WTO accession. Just six weeks ago nothing had been written for the FTRM and Parvanta, who remains a one-woman show for Afghanistan's accession efforts, was expressing frustration about the lack of support she was receiving from both the GOA and UNCTAD. The Embassy will work with the Department, USAID, Commerce and USTR to bring Parvanta and a small GOA team to Washington for inter-agency trade policy training, similar to the program that was done for Iraq in November, 2004.